



From Urbanization to Metropolization: A Conceptual Approach

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Keywords

City
Metropolis
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Abstract

The article approaches the processes of metropolization with regard to urban development and spatial organization of the city in their continuous and articulated processes. The perspective of this analysis is that there is a new basis for urban/metropolitan dynamics, moving out from an industrial and post-Fordist economy to a financialization of the economy, which we call metropolization. From the recent dynamics of the concentration of people and the expansion of urban space, some discussions can emerge about the new socio-spatial reality. Concerning metropolization, our main objective is to discuss the concept of urbanization and metropolization, aiming to understand the spatial transformations of the contemporary world. In methodological terms, we sought a bibliographic survey on the dialogical relationship between urbanization and metropolization with Brazilian and foreign authors who are relevant in the Brazilian academic literature and, in turn, are present in the urban/metropolitan analysis. The presence of temporal, economic and spatial dimensions has been deemed the main drivers for metropolization. As a result, the concept of metropolization was understood as a socio-spatial process that interferes in the forms, functions and dynamics of large urban spaces, and that has been acquiring importance in the context of the contemporary world, being a characteristic that pervades urbanization, reaching both countries in the global South as in the global North.

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INTRODUCTION

The 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century are marked by intense transformations in the urbanization process associated with new industrial logics, especially financial ones, which become more fluid. With new doctrines such as globalization and new political-economic forms in the world, we can consider two factors: i) advances in the technical-scientific-informational world and the new articulations of contemporary capitalism that mark the spatial dynamics of the 1950s-1960s and 1980-1990 (Santos, 1996; Sposito, 2004); ii) the new regional-global capitalist logics based on the new flows of the 1990s-2010s with new nomenclatures such as – hyper urbanization – spirals of infinite accumulation that address the new flows and scopes of Geopolitics (Brenner, 2001).

Starting from these complex formations and processes of urban agglomerations/concentrations, we are responsible for reflecting on reality through conceptual contributions that are relevant to geographic science, such as: city, urban, urbanization, metropolis and metropolization – emerging concepts according to the Brazilian and Global realities.

Given the situation of large-scale urban concentrations (megalopolis, metropolis, among other concepts), one can mention the emergence of the urban era with the increase in demographic density and social, cultural and economic changes in city areas. This understanding opens up the possibility of reading about the metropolitan context, which appears as a way to think about it, and thus points to investigations of the contemporary urban/metropolitan period that leads to an in-depth reflection on the post-industrial society when it relates to the new spatial processes (Ascher, 2012, Lefèvre, 2010, Boudreau *et al.*, 2007).

In the 21st century, what we actually have is the “metropolis” as a scientific concept and/or theme, and a “metropolis” of common sense, or what we can call in the latest studies in Human Sciences “media common sense”. In other words, how do we discuss urbanization and metropolization? Are they complementary or successive processes?

In view of this, the main objective of the article is to discuss and produce a path between the approximation of the concepts of urbanization and metropolization, based on a bibliographical survey capable of explaining the passage of the industrialization process, closely

linked to the concept of urbanization; and the financialization of the economy centered on the metropolis and, consequently, on metropolization.

Therefore, this is a brief theoretical essay to understand the “gaps” between urbanization and metropolization, since for some theorists, the discussion of the two concepts refers to the idea of cause and consequence, or simply as “historical periods”. Reinforcing that the intention is not to think of a new concept regarding metropolization, and far from exhausting the subject, we intend, rather, to bring to light a conceptual reflection with a rapprochement between the concepts of urbanization and metropolization.

Urbanization: city movements in transition

When we talk about cities and their logic in current dynamics, we emphasize that the understanding of space does not only start from simple divisions between urban-rural or metropolitan/non-metropolitan, but from new forms and socio-spatial structures that are constantly (re)constructed in the face of concentration of fixed and flows (assets), as well as their diffusion and deconcentration. Perhaps, urbanization, unequally attached to spatial metropolization, is the main continuous form of spatial production at the present moment.

When we talk about “unequal urbanization”, it is necessary to quote Harvey (2010) here regarding the broader and more comprehensive conception of the “metropolitan issue”, entitled “incomplete urbanization”. This approached concept shows the logic of the capitalist system itself in promoting and resolving profit and capital crises, in producing “urbanizations” in the face of aggregation/disaggregation.

Therefore, based on the logic of polarization and metropolitan dynamics, we can understand metropolitan/regional production, as it is the most important form of change in current spatial production. We thus have new spatial logics that, based on the (re)production of space, now start not only from urbanization per se, but from metropolization. Thus, diffuse, continuous and dense fragmentation/concentration are essential characteristics of the metropolization of space.

Thus, “metropolises present themselves as socioeconomically articulated spaces, but unequal and contradictory, with a strictly urban way of life that establishes relationships with various social, spatial and economic agents”. (Araújo, 2012, p.8). In this context, we understand that cities, at the same time as they are part of the processes of metropolization,

urbanization and fragmentation, also promote new dynamic places in the presence of an emerging order of techniques and technologies of a national and international nature. In other words, there is no way to discuss urbanization without having new metropolitan dynamics as a basis. In other words, they are continuous processes, concomitant of the current spatial and continuous (re)production.

The city-metropolis epistemology takes us to the discussion by Santos (1994) when he points out the two spaces that stand out in the context of urbanization and metropolization: opaque spaces and luminous spaces.

- a) The first is characterized by the absence or precariousness of economic development (generally industrial), which is not interconnected to the capitalist economic network;
- b) The second has advanced techniques and technologies, where companies (generally multinationals) and the State have a strong economic and political apparatus to favor flows and profits through urban dynamics. Santos (2009) also states that metropolises are increasingly bright spaces, obeying an urban and economic hierarchy increasingly interconnected with global flows.

Regarding the urbanization/metropolization process, we can mention Limonad (2008) who analyzes the North American model of “diffuse urbanization” in relation to the random extension of investments and resources in some areas, such as the discontinuous expansion of small urban agglomerations with industrial, commercial and even tourist characteristics. In terms of tourism, we can illustrate with the Northeastern region of Brazil, whose investments in the construction of coastal roads and airports, including renovations, completely changed the urban dynamics around. In that region, its state capitals are established as the locus of reception and distribution of tourist flows in the coastal zone and preferably in the coastal municipalities of the main metropolitan regions of the Northeastern region as follows: Fortaleza, Natal, Recife, and Salvador (Dantas, 2013).

With dispersed urbanization, spaces obey an urban hierarchy where certain areas lead actions and investments. By highlighting the relevance of dispersed urbanization in metropolises, we discuss how metropolitan spaces are essentially produced by differentiations and multifaceted articulations,

which breaks away from intrametropolitan spaces, reaching increasingly complex and higher spatial levels.

Regarding growing urbanization, it has caused a true revolution in spatial production with new forms, processes, and social agents. Urbanization means change: in society's habits, welfare, and housing policies, in neoliberal political regimes; social changes, as well as cultural preferences for urban life (Atkinson, 2014; Musterd *et al.*, 2016; Stoper, 2016).

Thus, the formation of the urban fabric and centralities can be identified as important characteristics of the urbanization process. The contradictory and dialectical reality occurs within the urban itself, detected, on the one hand, through centers of wealth and power, and, on the other hand, seen from the peripheries, showing integration and segregation/fragmentation at the same time. (DE MATTOS, 2008; 2004; AGUILAR, 2002).

Faced with urban dynamics, with gigantic concentrations and a more discontinuous urban fabric, resulting in the expansion of urban characteristics with increasingly complex attributes, the possibility of a contemporary metropolitan reading opens up. Investigations into the urban-metropolitan area led us to reflect on the concepts of “industrial society” and the “knowledge society” or “post-industrial”.

In the book “A revolução urbana” (The urban revolution), Lefebvre (2004) identifies the existence of an urban social time, with a disciplinary character, which became notorious, mainly from the second half of the 19th century, a period in which the growth of cities and the advent of new techniques resulted in the production of a new urban society.

Given this, the question arises as to what would be the meaning of the contemporary urban theory and what will come with metropolization?

Metropolis and Metropolization of space: dialogues and perspectives

At the beginning of the 21st century, faced with the speed of flows of capital, goods and people, large metropolises are faced with the effects of globalization, generating enormous complexity in the metropolitan reality (Hamel; Keil, 2017). It is appropriate to carry out metropolitan studies by crossing knowledge from different areas of knowledge, due to the complexity of new economic, cultural values, among others, that are observed in metropolitan spaces (Peck, 2011).

“The metropolitan issue has come to the fore in recent years, not least due to the awareness

that cities today have a different scale and require an analytical update and intervention [...]”. (Firkowski; Casares, 2014, p. 4103). Lencioni (2003, p. 2) states that: “The phenomenal appearance of this new urban fact has received different denominations and conceptualizations. Whatever these denominations and concepts, [...] we are facing a new process”.

In this sense, the conceptualization and analysis of metropolization is sought with an attentive eye on the increasing speed of changes that have been registered in recent years. Thus, a new debate is encouraged about the contemporary complexity of large urban and metropolitan areas in the context of current socioeconomic conjecture. Given this, Lencioni (2015, p. 37-38) states that “If previously we had dominant logic of industrial capital related to the logic of urban, now we have the logic of financial capital related to the logic of metropolization”.

In this context, when referring to metropolization, the use of the word metropolis is recurrent, a word that is more ancient in use than metropolization and has already had some meanings. The term metropolis was used to define the Greek mother city, which exports its warriors, its traders and its culture to distant places (Abrantes, 2011). The word was later spread at the time of “discoveries” and colonization between the 14th and 19th centuries, referring to regulatory notions of domination (Derycke, 1999), with this meaning disappearing.

When talking about a metropolis, the understanding of the metropolization of space comes to the fore, and the current period has been marked by the metropolitan phenomenon, linked to deindustrialization, deconcentration and the explosion of the metropolis. In this way, metropolitan values and symbols are disseminated in a space that goes beyond the limits of metropolitan regions, thus, there are

spatial processes in transformation that mark the metropolitan content (Ferreira *et al.*, 2015).

Metropolization is understood as a process that goes beyond urbanization and goes beyond the administrative territory of a metropolis. Based on Abrantes (2011), we conceive metropolization as a temporal, demographic, economic, sociocultural, spatial and political process; In turn, the temporal, economic and spatial dimensions are considered mainly responsible for metropolization (Chart 01).

The concept of metropolization adopted in the field of science and spatial development refers to the current stage of urbanization, the intense regionalization in development in different regions and countries, regardless of their positions on the development axes. In this way, the metropolis presents itself as a representative of a post-urban stage of socio-spatial dynamics. The term refers to a unified theoretical framework, probably both to guide the interpretation of the current dynamics of territories around the world and to integrate technological consequences and more advanced forms of economic development (Ferrier, 2002).

The metropolization process requires an understanding of the socio-spatial transformations that manifest themselves spatially in urban sprawl. On the one hand, this spread, in a context of intense conurbations and advanced technologies together with network systems, causes territorial discontinuities. Such processes are called “metastatic metropolization” by Ascher (2012), which goes beyond certain classical models and differs from other times, presenting a new scale of problematization. On the other hand, it is understood that “[...] the large territorial dimension of the contemporary metropolis is the product of a process that conurbs cities and also fragments the territory, which refers to the idea of an urban archipelago” (Lencioni, 2008, p. 7).

Chart 01 - Metropolization

TEMPORALITY	The processes and analytical scales are complex regarding urbanization and metropolization. Contemporary advances in the urban era and urban society present a process of intensification and juxtaposition in the articulation of spatial scales in production and structuring that are no longer expressed specifically in the intra-urban, but are now particularized in the inter-urban with the networks of flows that intersect and intensify. New spatial network articulations enable flexibility and greater physical, symbolic and economic mobility within the network(s). (Brenner, 2004; 2018). This process designates the modalities of a change, a transformation, a movement that has been occurring over time. The transfer from a city to a metropolis implies a temporal transformation and depends on a transfer capacity. (Abrantes, 2011).
ECONOMIC	In terms of scale, it is in the metropolises (local level) where the greatest convergences of international economic flows occur (global level). “Metropolises are not just territories, they are also ways of life and modes of production (and) the complexity of these new urban spaces makes their geographical and statistical definition and representation difficult” (Ascher, 1998, p. 16). Metropolization has a relationship with political economy, with new spatial adjustments intensified by the flexible accumulation of capital under the doctrines of global capitalism.
SPATIAL	Metropolization is understood as a socio-spatial process that interferes in the forms, functions and dynamics of large urban spaces, it has been acquiring importance in the context of the contemporary world, being a characteristic that permeates urbanization reaching both countries with more advanced economies and countries with economies in phase of advancement (Gonçalves, 2017). Metropolises have been gaining several facets at the same time, presenting socially and spatially more homogeneous and at the same time distinct characteristics. This metropolitan framework is intrinsically linked to the internationalized economy (Scott, 1998).

Source: The authors (2023).

In this new stage of socio-spatial processes, changes taking place in metropolitan spaces in different regions of the world are recognized. There is the existence of a socioeconomic and spatial system based on technical and economic relations as general processes that change the world – globalization (Rocheffort, 2002; Rojas, 2005). The meaning we have is of rupture, but also of continuity. New elements make up the metropolitan expansion framework, which model ruptures in the face of overlapping previous elements, and many of them remain in the current phase. Thus, the techno-spatial system is conjectured based on the current geographic reality that is constructed in order to illuminate metropolization as a novelty within the history of cities and that is part of the ongoing reality.

Space metropolization process

It is evident that cities, like metropolises, are constantly changing in the face of the processes that produce them. Hence, the understanding of

contemporary acceleration combined with the interests of internationalized capitalism, has strong repercussions on social relations developed in cities and between cities, mainly in those that have become global or national metropolises, which are affected in different ways by the internationalization of capital (Brenner; Theodore, 2002).

Currently, given the restructuring of the economy and globalization that began in the 1970s, large cities in developed and developing countries are the main places for innovation, information and culture. Metropolises are consolidated by internal and external movement, and this is a dynamic process. In understanding the development of the metropolis historically linked to the city, however, the term should not be confused as a simple synonym for city.

At the heart of this issue, the metropolis is a manifestation of the spatial and productive logic that restructures the urban landscape, and, as such, is conceptually shaped at the end of a process during which old urban forms explode.

Recently, these processes of transformation in the understanding of metropolization unfold into two perspectives of analysis:

- 1) On the one hand, in the perspective that considers urban development and the spatial reorganization of the city as a process of continuity, which addresses the aspects of the economy that are present in metropolization associated with the transformations of social and spatial relations, whose change in scale of phenomena and territorial dispersion tendencies are linked to the changes in urban/metropolitan restructuring (Gonçalves, 2017).
- 2) On the other hand, from the perspective that it refers to a new urban cycle with an economic approach, in which we witness the articulation of the industrial and post-Fordist economy as an explanation of the processes of metropolization and globalization as a general phenomenon that induces and/or composes metropolization, based in transformations and new economic, technological, social, and cultural processes (Gonçalves, 2017).

Currently, there is a convergence between these two perspectives, that is, these explanatory principles do not exclude each other. In this way, the intrinsic relationship between these two reflections becomes important in the contemporary context of metropolitan reality. However, the change in scale and territorial spread are simply limited, since the change in scale would only cause the spread of classic deconcentration mechanisms, already traditional in the growth of the industrial city, to other territories.

Therefore, authors such as Lacour and Puissant (1999) and Leroy (2000) discuss studies of the metropolitan area, based on an approximation of the internationalization process, in which there are notable relationships between agglomerations and centralities, as well as between approximation and the spatial interaction of metropolises (depending on their functional specializations).

In this panorama, the local plane changes in the face of the global plane, the distant order that is established in the command centers of the globalized economy (Peck; Theodore, 2010). Sassen (1991) advanced the conceptions of the “global city”, indicating that in today's world, we are witnessing major changes in the role of cities through changes in the dynamics of economic activities, increasingly moving from industrial to tertiary.

Silva (2000) states that there is a reinforcement of the role of several cities (especially state capitals), which become large centers for the redistribution of industrialized products and collection centers for agricultural production in their respective areas of influence. Thus, we can bring up the issue and arguments against the backstage of the Ceará metropolis: Fortaleza. Where, the role assumed by the tertiary sector partially justifies its growth and the influence it exerts over a vast space that extends beyond state limits. Both in the Northeast and in the state of Ceará, the sector has not yet found the development it had in the Central-South axis of the country. On the contrary, it was the tertiary sector that made it possible to advance the metropolization process and its nuances not only in Fortaleza, but also in Salvador, Recife, and Natal.

Dialoguing with Ferreira (2014, p.3) “Currently, we are experiencing an urban moment that is no longer so marked by the spatial logics of industry, something that causes transformations in cities, as we move from an economy based on industry to one linked to services”.

The metropolization process refers to the era in which new agglomerative spatialities permeate within the restructuring of the world economy (Chart 02). Therefore, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the study on metropolization pertinent to the issue of the post-Fordist and technological revolution with the deepening of functional specialization was formalized, that is, with the restructuring of the economy and globalization, the aspects of the economic systems in the cities, notably those fostering networks, become the basis for discussing the reproduction of metropolitan spaces.

Chart 02 - Metropolization as a process

May (1997)	Set of processes that favor the concentration of populations and activities in the largest urban complexes, the only ones capable of offering a critical mass of attributes that have become decisive.
Claval (2003)	Consequence of the globalization of the economy due to the rapid progress, from the mid-1970s, of transport, telecommunications, and technologies.
Haeringer (2000)	Movement of concentration of economic power in several cities (...) movement of concentration of people in increasingly vast urban basins (...) dissemination of urban space.
Dolez and De Paris (2004)	Advancement of the metropolization process as a new system of spatial development that emerges as a conceptual support for development dynamics.
Lencioni (2011)	The process of metropolitanization of space is understood as a higher phase of urbanization. In this context, the tendency of large companies to delegate part of their command to branches spread across several countries. In fact, to improve their competitiveness, multinationals entrust their subsidiaries to local administrators, as they are able to understand more clearly the specificities of management and production methods.
Ferreira (2014)	The metropolization of space as a process based on the factors: intensity of flows of people, goods and capital; management concentration; growth of services, demand for intangible labor (scientific development); construction of a way of living and consumption in the contemporary metropolis.
Benko (2002)	Thus, we have “metropolization” as a process of the world economy, with nodal points that obviously propagate the globalization of the economy, and, therefore, the power of the metropolis in the current world is evident in privileged places where “[...] growth, power and wealth [...] increasingly concentrate in a limited number of large hubs”
Moura (2013)	Metropolization is associated with the densest and most articulated form of urban-regional compositions, whose concentration of population and activities (especially those of greater complexity) triggered throughout history and in a given time-space, under the action of different elements and socioeconomic conditions, as well as the performance of specific policies that emerge on a global scale.

Source: Adapted from Abrantes (2011).

It is evident that the metropolization process has a relationship with the political economy, with the new spatial adjustments intensified by the flexible accumulation of capital under the dictates of global capitalism (Scott, 2001).

In this way, metropolization has the property of economic mutations on a global scale that have repercussions on a local-regional scale. In this sense, Lencioni (2003, p. 2) states: “The phenomenal appearance of this new urban fact has received different denominations and conceptualizations. Whatever these denominations and conceptualizations may be,

it is clear that we are facing a new process and a new way of producing space.”

The metropolitan model, when presenting these characteristics, is not restricted only to the idea of agglomeration, density, morphology and urban sprawl, however, such characteristics are inseparable from economic, cultural, social, and political transformations. Therefore, the concept of metropolization is related to the spread of activities, functions, groups in space, in a relationship of interdependence and geographic connection in local networks.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Metropolization is seen as a process linked to globalization, in which city-regions are advancing as places where issues arise, such as: economic growth and wealth, social inequalities, environmental degradation and multicultural integration. Thus, the understanding of the metropolization process, with the dispersion of activities and flows throughout the metropolitan territory and, therefore, the urban landscape is perceived as distended, discontinuous and territorially fragmented.

In this sense, cities are under the aegis of the metropolization process and are exceptional places in the event of contemporary life, inserted in a web of activities where these spaces are dynamic, contradictory and complex in terms of their interpretation. Demographic growth and economic strength, in turn, were not able to provoke a more equitable distribution of goods and services towards the assumptions of social justice. On the contrary, the expanding city achieved a metropolitan form and neglected a significant part of its territory, especially those located in peripheral areas, not yet valued by the financialization of real estate capital. Densely populated sectors contrast with others, which are pleasant, regardless of their scenic potential. The debasement of use further compromises what was already meager in relation to society's demands.

In a society in which the space of global networks is growing and with greater social complexity, large urban centers have to adapt to respond to a leading role in the growing logics evidenced by globalization, that is, in a context marked by interactions and international flows.

Thus, we have the “metropolization” of the world economy, with nodal points that obviously propagate the globalization of the economy, and, therefore, the power of the metropolis in the current world is evident in privileged places (Benko, 2002). The metropolization process accentuates contradictions and highlights the unequal context of wealth distribution in the global context.

In other words, Harvey (2004) declares that the capitalist system is so advanced in terms of its spatial logics that it does not just “transform nature” into artificial places. Thus, we have a new “era”, in which urbanized spaces become increasingly urbanized. In other words, the “urban” produces other “urbans”, a “spatial reproduction”. Therefore, the old urban-rural dichotomy becomes insufficient to explain today's new spatial logics. As a result, metropolization/regionalization linked only to

“smaller scales” of analysis become important concepts for the new existing spatial logics, in the local-regional-national-global link.

In this article, there was a convergence of readings with an analytical basis consisting of different approaches to the theme within contemporary times around the concepts of metropolis and metropolization, through an interdisciplinary dialogue and using different authors with multiple visions that enabled an effective academic exchange and its consequences.

Therefore, in agreement with Michel Lussault (2010) when he states that: metropolization would therefore be the most spectacular expression of contemporary urbanization – a “diffusion” that fundamentally reconfigures societies, spaces and lifestyles. What would appear today, as a reduced continuation of the evolution of human habitation on the planet, is what I will call the metropolitan urban, a generic type whose progression can be observed throughout the world, in cities of all sizes.

We are aware that we have established a broad and complex dialogue, and we are certain that we have chosen qualified authors committed to understanding urban and metropolitan transformations in the contemporary world. Aware that the range is multiple and features adjustment and overlap according to the analytical scale.

Faced with the complexity of the process of production and organization of space, geographers seek to explain reality in the incessant search for the integration of socially constructed knowledge with the subjectivity of spatial practices, seeking to understand the meaning of places and the specificities of territories expressed in the landscapes. Many closely follow the dynamics of the production of space, with the perspective of participating and interpreting the process of achieving full citizenship where the concept of social equity emerges as a possibility (Lefebvre, 2006).

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

The present article is the result of the authors' discussions in their doctoral theses. The author Tiago Estevam Gonçalves in his thesis: "Shopping centers and the metropolization process in Fortaleza" proposed the systematization of concepts and theories of urbanization and metropolization over focus on Lefebvre's urban theories and ideas from a global perspective, making use of recent

theoretical and empirical developments. Lefebvre's context emphasizes a structuralist way of seeing "the city and the metropolis" that underpins the beginning of the article and demands a post-temporal discussion. It enabled a structural organization of the thinking of authors such as Lencioni, Abrantes, Brenner, and Peck.

The author José Borzachiello da Silva presented concepts and theories addressed in the sense of having a "continuity" and "epistemological filtering" between temporal and spatial periods, in addition to executing a systematic bibliographical review and proposing corrections regarding the exposition of concepts and theories utilized. It enabled an articulation of national and international authors such as Ferreira, Lacour, Scott, and Moura.

The author Enos Feitosa de Araújo, whose thesis was: "Government policies and metropolization in the Brazilian Northeast: spatial notes in the cities of João Pessoa (PB), Maceió (AL) and Aracaju (SE)", presented the complementation of the concepts of metropolization and urbanization based on a post-structuralist "logic", aimed at understanding spatial production, whether through urbanization and metropolization [with concepts more linked to new economic activities].

The authors carried out a bibliographic and structural review individually. Therefore, to reduce conceptual and/or epistemological errors, and to find the demands of the journal.



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